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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [MI](#)
SUBJECT: MUTHARIKA BACKS OFF TROOP COMMITMENT TO
SOMALIA

REF: (A) STATE 5683, (B) LILONGWE 28, (C) LILONGWE 42

1.(SBU) Despite previous statements by the GOM's Minister of Defense(reftel C) and public reports out of Addis Ababa, President Mutharika said on January 30 that Malawi has not yet made a decision to commit troops to an AU mission in Somalia.

2.(SBU) Mutharika, at a press conference on his return from the AU Summit, pointedly denied that Malawi had made a decision to commit forces to an AU Somalia mission. He said that the opposition had not been consulted, the Cabinet had not approved, no "formal request" had been received, nor had Malawi received clear information about what role would be expected for Malawi's troops, i.e, whether it would be a combat mission, a static guard mission, or policing.

3. (SBU) Mutharika did not rule out Malawi's inclusion in the Somalia mission. He merely made it clear that he had not authorized the Minister of Defense's previous statements on this issue. According to a GOM official, the troop deployment is expected to be discussed during Mutharika's next cabinet meeting on February 2.

4.(SBU) Comment: Mutharika seems intent on assuaging the opposition before the February 19 parliamentary session. Opposition leader John Tembo had recently been quoted in the press questioning why his party hadn't been consulted regarding the mission. Mutharika could thus be trying to take Somalia off the table as a potential problem-point during the parliamentary session. We will continue to follow up with the GOM on this issue. End Comment.

EASTHAM